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V CORPS ENGINEERS DISMANTLE, MOVE IRAQ BRIDGE

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, Iraq —People often say they'll "cross that bridge when they get to it." But for Soldiers of V Corps' 502nd Engineer Company, the mission was more complex: moving the bridge when they got to it.

About 35 of the unit's Soldiers recently loosened, lifted, carried and otherwise dismantled the Mabey Johnson Bridge five miles south of Tikrit and moved it to Assydnia, near Forward Operating Base Anaconda.

Seven floating spans connected two land spans, and engineers dismantled one span at a time.

Normally, engineers start in the middle when dismantling a bridge, said 1st Lt. Christina Williams, a platoon leader with the 502nd. This time was different, the lieutenant added.



SGT W. WAYNE MARLOW

Soldiers of V Corps' 502nd Engineer Company lift one of the many pieces of the Mabey Johnson bridge near Tikrit, Iraq. The engineers dismantled the bridge and moved it from its original location east of Tikrit to Assydnia.

"Normally you wouldn't break it down like we did, but the commander had security concerns. So instead we started on one of the land sides, with Soldiers pulling security," Williams said.

Despite the heavy labor the task required, the engineers stayed in high spirits. "I think that's because they work together a lot," Williams said. "It's all about teamwork and having to talk to each other. Everyone has to lift at the same time and you can't drop it before someone else."

Williams said leaders planned well and everyone understood his role in the mission, so "the execution part just fell together."

The engineers finished the project ahead of schedule. "They've all done a great job," Williams said.

"They work hard. They give it their all. They know how to be professional without being uptight about it. They take care of each other. When you're all striving to accomplish the same goal, it's nice."

Besides the job satisfaction, the engineers also have the knowledge that they made a difference.

"It feels good to help the Iraqi people," Williams said. "They've always been treated like they're insignificant."

Sgt. 1st class Dwayne Cordier described the task as one of the tougher ones he has faced in his 14 years of service. While this mission was difficult, no one complained, said Cordier, a 502nd platoon sergeant who is on his second tour in Iraq.

"This is why we're here," Cordier said. "We're bridgers. The spirits are great. We were always asking, 'How can we do the next piece faster or better?'"

"You can be in the Army 15 years and never do your job in combat, and this is the one opportunity," he said. "We train in the rear for almost every scenario, but we'd never seen a floating piece before this."

"It's good that we can do something to better the people."

